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AML 2410, Section 8974

October 17, 2013

Response Paper 3 on *Beloved*

Slavery was a difficult time for all African Americans. Repeatedly in the novel *Beloved,* the characters who were enslaved referred to themselves as being treated as animals or worse than animals. This era was extremely difficult for women with children that had to endure the pain of seeing their own child beaten, raped or scandalized in any type of way. Another phrase that is commonly repeated in *Beloved* is “not to love something too much.” During the time of slavery, loving something too much caused more pain to one, especially when they had to see that thing or person ripped apart from them or hurt by a slave master. With all this terror and horror going, living seemed like a miserable thing to do. However, when one is in community or have some form of solidarity, pain can be alleviated. Toni Morrison in *Beloved* shows the importance of solidarity during trying times to help one relive the past to find closure and comfort in one’s company.

Reliving the past of slavery is not something that one would like to do mainly because it is filled with pain and sorrow. Nonetheless, readers witness that Sethe is constantly having flashbacks of the past. With Paul D’s companionship Sethe is able to relieve her bottled up pain of the past to him. In particular, Sethe all along did not have any idea to why Halle left her or never came to her when he was supposed to (68-69). Paul D was able to explain to her why Halle did not. Although some may say that Paul D brought pain to Sethe by telling her the truth, what Paul D actually did was bring closure to Sethe. Now, Sethe does not have to wonder why Halle never came or if he died or not. Sethe knows the truth about Halle and does not need to make any assumptions. Paul D’s ability to give Sethe another perspective of how her incident with her milk being stolen, showed that Halle was terribly affected by this event too. Re-experiencing a painful memory from one perspective can serve as “bringing pain back alive” but, because Sethe had Paul D, she felt like there was more to her past beyond what she was able to see. She even mentions that she was “hungry” for more information about her past (70).

Toni Morrison also revealed how comforting it can be to have camaraderie. Beloved, although a stranger, serves as an important character to both Sethe and Denver. To Denver, Beloved is the sister that she always wanted. Denver cares for Beloved like a mother will care for her child (54). Even Sethe notices this and mentions that her daughter has been very lonesome (55). Camaraderie has the power to help one through their trying times. It helps them shift their focus on something new rather than focusing on the past. Readers can also tell that Beloved is important to Denver because, Denver lies about not seeing Beloved lift a rocking chair with one arm just because she wants Beloved to stay (56). Beloved represent an escape route to Denver which is significant because Denver has been through a lot and not having siblings as company makes matters worse for her. Denver is also able to share some of her past story with Beloved. Toni Marrison makes it clear to the readers that when something traumatic happens to people they tend to revisit their past. Doing this alone can serve as bottled up pain but having someone to share your past with can make a difference and bring closure. During the era that this novel takes place, having a comrade helped getting through each day a little bit easier.

**Open ended question:** Why is that slavery had the ability to take one’s true identity away?